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DEPT FOR AF/EX

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SUBJECT: JEM OFFICIAL ON REGIONAL DYNAMICS

REF: ASMARA 384

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald K. McMullen for reason 1.4 (d)

1. (C) SUMMARY: Osman A. Wash, JEM's Asmara-based Secretary for Legal Affairs, averred that disgruntled pro-government gunmen were behind the recent kidnapping of Chinese oil workers in Southern Kordofan. He detailed Eritrean support for the JEM in Eritrea, was dubious about the Qatari initiative, and said the Isaias regime maintains links with JEM as political leverage with Khartoum. End Summary.

2. (C) "It Wasn't Us, But We Warned Them"  
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Osman A. Wash, JEM's Secretary of Legal Affairs and an ethnic Nubian, met with the ambassador at the Peacebuilding Center for the Horn of Africa November 5. He denied Khartoum's allegations that JEM was behind last month's attack on Chinese oil workers in Southern Kordofan, claiming Sudanese officers hired gunmen to fight in Abyei and then stiffed them. The unpaid fighters took their revenge by kidnapping Chinese workers for ransom. "In any case, we warned the Chinese against buying oil and selling weapons to the NCP," Wash said rather unsympathetically.

3. (C) Dubious About Qatari Initiative  
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The JEM official said his movement welcomed all proposals that could bring peace and justice to Sudan, but admitted JEM didn't know much about the substance of the Qatari initiative. He questioned the sincerity of Arab League support for the Qatari proposal, suggesting it might be only a way to deflect movement on an ICC indictment of Bashir. "The Arab League could have gotten involved long ago why now?" he wondered aloud. He also commented that the Darfuri people have suffered mightily, adding, "there can be no peace without accountability."

4. (C) 200 JEM "Former Fighters" in Eritrea  
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Prior to the Sudan-Eritrea rapprochement and the 2006 Eastern Sudan Peace Agreement, JEM conducted cross-boarder operations into Sudan from Eritrea. Since that time some 200 "former fighters," many of whom suffered wounds or illness, have languished in a camp south of Asmara, Wash stated. The government of Eritrea provides some commodities and staples, while the JEM office in Asmara sees to minimal salaries, health care, and incidental expenses. The JEM official revealed that he travels on an Eritrean passport and uses an Eritrean cell phone, a highly restricted item here. (Wash's cell phone number is 291-1-7124895.) He said he has relatively good freedom of movement, although he described

the former fighters in his charge as "blocked."

15. (C) Why Does Eritrea Allow a JEM Office in Asmara?  
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Wash agreed with the ambassador's contention that Sudan is probably Eritrea's most reliable friend at present. Why then, does the Isaias regime allow JEM, an active military opponent of the Bashir government, to maintain a presence in Eritrea? Wash opined that Isaias thinks he can play a substantial role in negotiating a settlement between Khartoum and Darfur and uses the presence of muzzled (toothless?) JEM fighters in Eritrea as "political leverage" in dealing with Khartoum.

MCMULLEN